

AP Prompts

The following is a list of open-ended questions (Q3's) asked on AP examinations since 1971. They are a valuable collection of assignments for AP practice essays.

2006 - Many writers use a country setting to establish values within a work of literature. For example, the country may be a place of virtue and peace or one of primitivism and ignorance. Choose a novel or play in which such a setting plays a significant role. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the country setting functions in the work as a whole.

2005 - In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), protagonist Edna Pontellier is said to possess "that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions." In a novel or play that you have studied, identify a character who conforms outwardly while questioning inwardly. Then write an essay in which you analyze how this tension between outward conformity and inward questioning contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid mere plot summary.

2004 Critic Roland Barthes has said, "Literature is the question minus the answer." Choose a novel or play and, considering Barthes' observation, write an essay in which you analyze a central question the work raises and the extent to which it offers any answers. Explain how the author's treatment of this question affects your understanding of the work as a whole.

2003 According to critic Northrop Frye, "Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning." Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

2002 Morally ambiguous characters — characters whose behavior discourages readers from identifying them as purely evil or purely good — are at the heart of many works of literature. Choose a novel or play in which a morally ambiguous character plays a pivotal role. Then write an essay in which you explain how the character can be viewed as morally ambiguous and why his or her moral ambiguity is significant to the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

2001 One definition of madness is "mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it." But Emily Dickinson wrote

Much madness is divinest Sense — To a discerning Eye — Novelists and playwrights have often seen madness with a "discerning Eye." Select a

novel or play in which a character's apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the "madness" to the work as a whole.

2000 Many works of literature not readily identified with the mystery of detective story genre nonetheless involve the investigation of a mystery. In these works, the solution to the mystery may be less important than the knowledge gained in the process of its investigation. Choose a

novel or play in which one or more of the characters confront a mystery. Then write an essay in which you identify the mystery and explain how the investigation illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

1999 The eighteenth-century British novelist Laurence Stern wrote, “No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.” From a novel or play choose a character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict within one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

1998 In his essay “Walking,” Henry David Thoreau offers the following assessment of literature: In literature it is only the wild that attracts us. Dullness is but another name for tameness. It is the Uncivilized free and wild thinking in Hamlet and The Illiad, in all scriptures and mythologies, not learned in schools, that delights us. From the works you have studied in school, choose a novel, play, or epic poem that you may initially have thought was conventional and tame but that you now value for its “uncivilized free and wild thinking.” Write an essay in which you explain what constitutes its “uncivilized free and wild thinking” and how that thinking is central to the value of the work as a whole. Support your ideas with specific references to the work you choose

1997 Novels and plays often include scenes of weddings, funerals, parties, and other social occasions. Such scenes may reveal the values of the characters and the society in which they live. Select a novel or play that includes such a scene and, in a focused essay, discuss the contribution the scene makes to the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or another novel or play of literary merit.

1996 The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: “The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from readers are the writers who offer a happy ending through moral development. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events: a marriage or a last-minute rescue from death; but some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death.” Choose a novel or play that has the kind of ending Weldon describes. In a well-written essay, identify the spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.

1995 Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Choose a play or novel in which such a character plays a significant role, and show how that character’s alienation reveals the surrounding society’s assumptions and moral values. Do NOT write on a short story, poem, or film.

1994 In some works of literature, a character who appears briefly, or does not appear at all, is a significant presence. Choose a novel or play of literary merit and write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. Avoid plot summary.

1993 “The true test of comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.” (George Meredith)

Choose a novel, play, or a long poem in which a scene or character awakens thoughtful laughter in the reader. Write an essay in which you show why this laughter is thoughtful and how it contributes to the meaning of the work.

1992 In a novel or play, a confidant (male) or confidante (female) is a character, often a friend or relative of the hero or heroine, whose role is to be present when the hero or heroine needs a sympathetic listener to confide in. Frequently the result is, as Henry James remarked, that the confidant or confidante can be as much “the reader’s friend as the protagonist’s.” However, the author sometimes uses this character for other purposes as well. Choose a confidant or confidante from a novel or play of recognized literary merit and write an essay in which you discuss the various ways this character functions in the work. You may write your essay on one of the following novels or plays or on another of comparable quality, do not write on a poem or short story.

1991 Many plays and novels use contrasting places (for example, two countries, two cities or towns, two houses, or the land and the sea) to represent opposed forces or ideas that are central to the work. Choose a novel or play that contrasts two such places. Write an essay explaining how the places differ, what each place represents, and how their contrast contributes to the meaning of the work.

1990 Choose a novel or play that depicts a conflict between a parent (or a parental figure) and a son or daughter. Write an essay in which you analyze the sources of the conflict and explain how the conflict contributes to the meaning of the work. Avoid plot summary.

1989 In questioning the value of literary realism, Flannery O’Connor has written, “I am interested in making a good case for distortion because I am coming to believe that it is the only way to make people see.” Write an essay in which you make a good case for distortion, as distinct from literary realism. Base your essay on a work from the following list or choose another work of comparable merit that you know well. Analyze how important elements of the work you choose are distorted and explain how these distortions contribute to the effectiveness of the work. Avoid plot summary.

1988 Choose a distinguished novel or play in which some of the most significant events are mental or psychological; for example, awakenings, discoveries, changes in consciousness. In a wellorganized essay, describe how the author manages to give these internal events the sense of excitement, suspense, and climax usually associated with external action, Do not merely summarize the plot.

1987 Some novels and plays seem to advocate changes in social or political attitudes or in traditions. Choose a novel or play and note briefly the particular attitudes or traditions that the author apparently wishes to modify. Then analyze the techniques the author uses to influence the reader’s or audience’s views. Avoid plot summary.

1986 Some works of literature use the element of time in a distinct way. The chronological sequence of events may be altered, or time may be suspended or accelerated. Choose a novel, an epic, or a play of recognized literary merit and show how the author’s manipulation of time contributes to the effectiveness of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

1985 A critic has said that one important measure of a superior work of literature is its ability to produce in the reader a healthy confusion of pleasure and disquietude. Select a literary work that produces this healthy confusion. Write an essay in which you explain the sources of the pleasure and disquietude experienced by the readers of the work. You may base your essay on a work from the list below or choose another work of comparable literary merit. Do not base your essay on a movie, television program, or other adaptation of a work.

1984 Select a line or so of poetry, or a moment or scene in a novel, epic poem, or play that you find especially memorable. Write an essay in which you identify the line or the passage, explain its relationship to the work in which it is found, and analyze the reasons for its effectiveness. Do not base your essay on a work that you know about only from having seen a television or movie production of it. Select a work of recognized literary merit.

1983 From a novel or play of literary merit, select an important character who is a villain. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the nature of the character's villainy and show how it enhances meaning in the work. Do not summarize plot.

1982 In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a work of literary merit that confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work. Avoid plot summary.

1981 The meaning of some literary works is often enhanced by sustained allusion to myths, the Bible, or other works of literature. Select a literary work that makes use of such a sustained reference. Then write a well-organized essay in which you explain the allusion that predominates in the work and analyze how it enhances the work's meaning.

1980 A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between passion and responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Choose a literary work in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a wellwritten essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work. Avoid plot summary.

1979 Choose a complex and important character in a novel or a play of recognized literary merit who might, on the basis of the character's actions alone, be considered evil or immoral. In a wellorganized essay, explain both how and why the full presentation of the character in the work makes us react more sympathetically than we otherwise might. Avoid plot summary.

1978 Choose an implausible or strikingly unrealistic incident or character in a work of fiction or drama of recognized literary merit. Write an essay that explains how the incident or character is related to the more realistic or plausible elements in the rest of the work. Avoid plot summary.

1977 A character's attempt to recapture or to reject the past is important in many plays, novels, and poems. Choose a literary work in which a character views the past with such feelings as reverence, bitterness, or longing. Show with clear evidence from the work how the character's view of the past is used to develop a theme in the work.

1976 The conflict created when the will of an individual opposes the will of the majority is the

recurring theme of many novels, plays, and essays. Select the work of an essayist who is in opposition to his or her society; or, from a work of recognized literary merit, select a fictional character who is in opposition to his or her society. In a critical essay analyze the conflict and discuss the moral and ethical implications for both the individual and the society. Do not summarize the plot or action of the work you choose.

1975 (Q1 of 2) Although literary critics have tended to praise the unique in literary characterization, many authors have employed the stereotyped character successfully. Select a work of acknowledged literary merit and, in a well-written essay, show how the conventional or stereotyped character or characters function to achieve the author's purpose.

1975 (Q2 of 2) Unlike the novelist, the writer of a play does not use his own voice and only rarely uses a narrator's voice to guide the audience's responses to character and action. Select a play you have read and write an essay in which you explain the techniques the playwright uses to guide his audience's responses to the central characters and the action. You might consider the effect on the audience of things like setting, the use of comparable and contrasting characters, and the characters' responses to each other. Support your argument with specific references to the play. Do not give a plot summary.

1974 Choose a work of literature written before 1900. Write an essay in which you present arguments for and against the work's relevance for person [today]. Your own position should emerge in the course of the essay. You may refer to works of literature written after 1900 for the purpose of contrast or comparison.

1973 An effective literary work does not merely stop or cease; it concludes. In the view of some critics, a work that does not provide the pleasure of significant closure has terminated with an artistic fault. A satisfactory ending is not, however, always conclusive in every sense; significant closure may require to the reader to abide with or adjust to ambiguity and uncertainty. In an essay discuss the end of a novel or play of acknowledged literary merit. Explain precisely how and why the ending appropriately or inappropriately concludes the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

1972 In retrospect the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel or the opening scene of a drama introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the opening scene of a drama or the first chapter of a novel in which you explain how it functions in this way. In your essay do not merely summarize the plot of the work you are discussing.

1971 The significance of a title such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is easy to discover. However, in other works the full significance of the title becomes apparent to the reader only gradually. Choose two works and show how the significance of their respective titles is developed through the author's use of devices such as contrast, repetition, allusion, and point of view.